

Artistic Research in Film

An Investigation of the Implementation of Artistic Research in Film Education in the Nordic Countries

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of Artistic Research (AR) in film and its implementation in film schools across the Nordic countries. It discusses the legal framework, educational programs, and the integration of AR into film education. The paper also compares the approaches of different institutions, such as Stockholm University of the Arts, The Norwegian Film School, and The Danish Film School. It highlights the challenges and opportunities of AR, emphasizing the importance of reflection and the creation of new knowledge through artistic practice.

Biography

Sigmund Trageton is an assistant professor in audiovisual storytelling at the University of Stavanger. He teaches in the bachelor's program in film and TV production and the master's program in documentary production. Mr. Trageton has a background as a photographer, editor and director, and over the past decade, he has focused his artistic research on technology development and new opportunities for storytelling.

Introduction

The scope of this project is to investigate the concept of Artistic Research (AR) in film and its implementation in film schools across the Nordic countries. The project was conducted during the author's educational leave in the fall of 2023 and finalized during 2024

Key Points:

- **Objective:** The main goal was to map out how AR is understood and implemented in film education in the Nordic countries. This involved reviewing various study programs to identify courses focusing on AR and how they are integrated with traditional professional subjects.
- **Methodology:** I have examined study plans and conducted interviews with faculty members at different institutions to gain deeper insights into their perspectives on AR, its traditions, methods, and its incorporation into teaching.
- In addition, the author participated in the Stockholm University of the Arts' presentation of artistic research master's expositions in May 2023 and two PhD defenses in artistic development work at The Norwegian Film School in November 2023.

- Inspiration for UiS and others: The project aims to learn from the experiences of other institutions how to integrate AR components into our own programs at all educational levels.

Background

Artistic Research, Artistic Development Work, and Artistic Practice are terms used over the past 30 years to describe creative activities in academia across various artistic fields. These terms have different interpretations and traditions across disciplines and countries. This section traces the development of these concepts in Norway, highlighting their inclusion in the University and College Act since 1995, which equates artistic development work with scientific research.

The University and College Act outlines the responsibilities of universities and colleges to offer high-level education, conduct research and artistic development work, and disseminate knowledge. It emphasizes academic freedom and the right of employees to choose their research subjects and methods. This legal framework has been crucial in establishing artistic development work as a core component of higher education in Norway.

The Program for Artistic Education (PKU) was established in 2003 to support artistic development projects. It includes a Fellowship Program and a Project Program, providing funding and opportunities for larger collaborative projects. The PKU has strengthened artistic development work at institutions and contributed to the proposal and establishment of a PhD in Artistic Research in 2018. This PhD program aims to normalize the highest level of education in performing and creative arts.

PhD in Artistic research

The guidelines for the PhD in Artistic Research emphasize the need for an artistic result and a reflection part, which should contribute to new knowledge, insight, and experience within the field. The reflection part should document the artistic process, theoretical and methodological choices, and the contribution to the field. This dual requirement ensures that artistic research is both practice-based and theoretically grounded.

The positioning and historical context in the artistic reflection is of vital importance. It highlights the need for education and knowledge about traditions and communication channels to ensure that artistic research is on par with scientific research. This involves creating a robust framework for documenting and sharing artistic insights, which can be challenging given the diverse and evolving nature of artistic practices.

Overall, the background section sets the stage for understanding the framework and significance of Artistic Research and Development Work in the Nordic countries, particularly in the context of higher education and legal requirements. It underscores the importance of integrating artistic practice with theoretical reflection to foster innovation and knowledge creation in the arts.

What is Artistic Research and What Methods Distinguish It from Traditional Scientific Research?

Artistic research is a complex field with various traditions and understandings of what it should be. Internationally, the term "Artistic Research" has been discussed and promoted as a distinct field since the 1990s. In the book "Artistic Research" (2004), Balkema and Slager write that:

"One could claim that the artistic field comprises the hermeneutic question of the humanities, the experimental sciences, and the societal commitment of the social sciences."

This statement highlights the multifaceted nature of artistic work. They further write:

"Another major topic concerns not only the specificity of the object of knowledge of artistic research but above all whether and how artistic research and its institutional programs will influence topical visual art, its artworks, and its exhibitions." (Balkema, 2004)

This remains a central part of the debate: both the knowledge that emerges through artistic development, where and how it should be published and anchored, and its utility for society and the artistic sphere outside academia. Mika Hannula, a Finnish academic and philosopher, defines Artistic Research as:

"It is a combination of artistic practice and theoretical approach while aiming at the production of knowledge. Within that combination of theory and practice." (Hannula, 2002)

The production of new insights and knowledge is central, but this insight comes through an experimental process between theory and practice. Therefore, the methodology is challenging to pinpoint. Hannula argues for an overarching structure in what he calls a "methodological map of reflection," which he divides into six steps:

1. Thorough exposition of research matter, premises, and motives.
2. Exposition of inherent promises in research subject and approach.
3. Appropriation of research tools and subject.
4. Classical mode of presentation (like traditional research).
5. Assessment of final result.
6. Reformulation of research practices of artistic research.

In this way, Hannula believes that a certain overarching structure is ensured, while also allowing the field and methods to continuously develop.

Henk Borgdorff has tried to distinguish between different forms of artistic research and has proposed the categories "research on the arts," "research for the arts," and "research

in the arts." The first category is more traditional art or musicology, where the art object is studied, while the other two are defined as follows:

***Research for the arts** can be described as applied research in a narrow sense. In this type, art is not so much the object of investigation, but its objective. The research provides insights and instruments that may find their way into concrete practices in some way or other. Examples are material investigations of particular alloys used in casting metal sculptures, investigation of the application of live electronics in the interaction between dance and lighting design, or the study of the 'extended techniques' of an electronically modifiable cello. In every case these are studies in the service of art practice. The research delivers, as it were, the tools and the knowledge of materials that are needed during the creative process or in the artistic product. I have called this the 'instrumental perspective'. (Borgdorff, 2006)*

This type of research is particularly relevant for Artistic Research in film and visual media because technological development is constantly advancing, offering new ways to technically and linguistically express an artistic vision. This type of research is easier to verbalize, discuss, and share in journals because one can point to specific examples of testing various methods and/or specific materiality. Borgdorff explains further:

***Research in the arts** is the most controversial of the three ideal types. Donald Schön speaks in this context of 'reflection in action', and I earlier described this approach as the 'immanent' and 'performative perspective'. It concerns research that does not assume the separation of subject and object, and does not observe a distance between the researcher and the practice of art. Instead, the artistic practice itself is an essential component of both the research process and the research results. This approach is based on the understanding that no fundamental separation exists between theory and practice in the arts. After all, there are no art practices that are not saturated with experiences, histories and beliefs; and conversely there is no theoretical access to, or interpretation of, art practice that does not partially shape that practice into what it is. Concepts and theories, experiences and understandings are interwoven with art practices and, partly for this reason, art is always reflexive. Research in the arts hence seeks to articulate some of this embodied knowledge throughout the creative process and in the art object. (Borgdorff, 2006)*

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Several have built on Borgdorff's work, and today there are many variations of Artistic Research and practice-based methods. Researchmethod.net has compiled an overview of different types of methods, trying to define what distinguishes them:

- **Practice-based Research:** Involves the creation of new artistic works as part of the research process, focusing on exploring artistic techniques, processes, and materials.

- **Research-led Practice:** Uses academic research methods to inform and guide the creative process, aiming to investigate and test new ideas and approaches to artistic practice.
- **Practice-led Research:** Uses artistic practice as a means of exploring research questions, aiming to develop new insights and understandings through the creative process.
- **Transdisciplinary Research:** Involves collaboration between artists and researchers from different disciplines, combining knowledge and expertise to create new insights and perspectives.
- **Research Through Performance:** Uses live performance as a means of investigating research questions, exploring the relationship between the performer and the audience.
- **Participatory Research:** Involves collaboration with communities and stakeholders to explore research questions, creating new knowledge through shared experiences and perspectives.

Not all of these types are equally well-established, but they signal the vast and complex nature of this field. Therefore, it was important that the Society for Artistic Research (SAR) and many art education institutions in 2018 came together to create "The Vienna Declaration of Artistic Research." The goal was to provide a clear definition of Artistic Research and its characteristics:

Excellent AR is research through means of high level artistic practice and reflection; it is an epistemic inquiry, directed towards increasing knowledge, insight, understanding and skills. Within this frame, AR is aligned in all aspects with the five main criteria that constitute Research & Development in the Frascati Manual. Through topics and problems stemming from and relevant to artistic practice, AR also addresses key issues of a broader cultural, social and economic significance.

AR is undertaken in all art practice disciplines - including architecture, design, film, photography, fine art, media and digital arts, music and the performing arts - and achieves its results both within those disciplines, as well as often in a transdisciplinary setting, combining AR methods with methods from other research traditions (Vienna Declaration of artistic research, 2018)

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The declaration emphasizes the duality between artistic practice and reflection, aiming to increase knowledge, insight, understanding, and skills. This broad scope makes it challenging to document and share the results. For example, a musician or dancer experimenting with new forms of expression may gain new insights and technical skills,

but verbalizing and sharing this can be difficult. In some cases, this becomes "embodied knowledge" tied to the individual performer.

Through the Research Catalog platform, SAR has tried to create a publishing channel that can help with this problem. Here, all types of media (sound, image, video, and text) can be combined in the best possible way to convey knowledge and insights that are difficult to verbalize. Publishing is important for both the professional community and institutions, not least to gain recognition for AR as a discipline on par with other research.

The declaration further states:

Evaluation & Recognition

AR is validated through peer review covering the range of disciplinary competences addressed by the work. Quality assurance is undertaken by recognised independent, international QA bodies and assures the standards described in the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Existing doctoral programmes in AR follow established standards as described in the Florence Principles 2016 which, in turn, are based on the policy documents of doctoral education within the Bologna education process (e.g. the Salzburg Principles 2005 & 2010 published by the EUA).

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The Nordic journal "Nordic Journal of Art & Research" published a special issue in 2022 on various research methods, highlighting the diversity within AR and how it can be connected to a more general research paradigm:

The field of artistic research is constituted not by one art-based or artistic research mode, but is nourished by several theoretical, scientific, and artistic approaches. To create a language for discussion and critique is demanding, but necessary in a developing field. Here we seek to connect artistic research to a more general reality of research paradigms today. Connecting to other contemporary tendencies in the humanities and social sciences, this also implies a push forward towards methodological crossovers and towards multimethod development that is not based on polarised dichotomies. (Christensen-Scheel et. al, 2022)

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Artistic Research and Film

The field of film has not been well represented in the tradition of Artistic Research (AR) until recently. In the Journal for Artistic Research (JAR), architecture and performance are more prominent, with only three articles on film or filmmaking. Music, dance,

choreography, and visual arts often have dedicated journals and conferences. In contrast, the film field has many festivals with professional discussions based on research and development. Additionally, there are both trade magazines (Rushprint, Sight and Sound, Variety, American Cinematographer, etc.) and more film-theoretical journals (Film Quarterly, Film Criticism, Studies in Documentary Film, etc.).

The Norwegian Media Journal published a special issue in 2022 focusing on Artistic Development Work, highlighting the long tradition of educational programs that combine practical and theoretical aspects, especially in film, TV, and video games. However, there are few academic contributions on how to use one's own practice and artistic development work in these fields in Norwegian and other Scandinavian languages.

The INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FILM AND MEDIA ARTS (2022) included six articles on AR in film. Gesa Martens and Joyti Mistry, in their article "Positions and Perspectives on Artistic Research in Film" discuss various positions and opinions on AR among colleagues in different film education programs. They note that while AR has evolved across disciplines, its formalization through the Bologna process has systematized some core ideas, making AR more of a discipline than a way of working through processes.

There is concern that AR may now be seen as a field of study rather than a working method, with less focus on how knowledge is created through artistic and creative practices. This skepticism is particularly relevant for film education, which has traditionally been closely tied to the industry. However, Erik Gandini (SKH) argues that AR can elevate the position of artists in academia, allowing them to work more freely than in the film industry.

The next chapter will explore how AR is implemented in education and the experiences and viewpoints of faculty members on this development. The transition to discussing AR and methods highlights the importance of understanding and consciously using methods in artistic practice, similar to the humanities. Bulley & Sandin (2001) suggest the term "research narrative» as a method for creating a meta-perspective on artistic practice, aiming to create new knowledge that can be used by others. In traditional science, method is central for clarifying research and ensuring transparency in publication and peer review. This is also important in AR, especially at the master's and Ph.D. levels.

Status in the Nordic Countries

Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH)

SKH has a well-established tradition of AR, with a clear focus on integrating artistic research into its programs.

The institution offers dedicated courses on AR methods and encourages interdisciplinary collaboration among students from various artistic disciplines.

The curriculum includes a progression from general AR methods to more specialized, discipline-specific research, culminating in a final exposition where students present their research findings.

The Norwegian Film School (DNF)

DNF has recently undergone significant changes, including a merger with TV and game schools to form a new faculty for audiovisual arts.

The school emphasizes practical, industry-oriented training but also incorporates elements of AR, particularly at the master's and PhD levels.

The curriculum includes courses on artistic development work, with a focus on reflective practice and the creation of new knowledge through artistic processes.

The Danish Film School (DDF)

DDF follows a different model, with a four-year program that does not conform to the Bologna process of bachelor's and master's degrees.

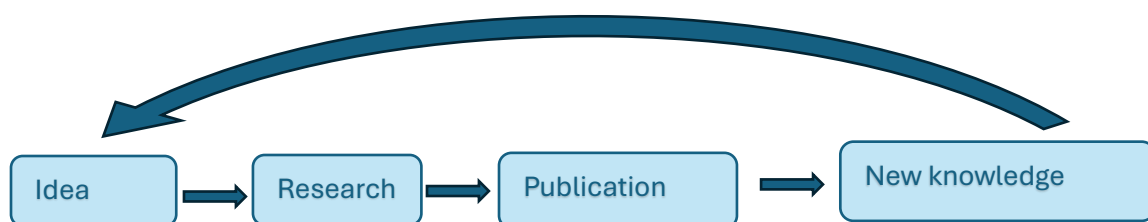
The school emphasizes practical training and industry readiness, with less focus on formal AR.

However, there are ongoing discussions about integrating more AR elements into the curriculum, inspired by other institutions like the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Copenhagen.

Artistic Research: A Double-Edged Sword

Artistic Research (AR) has been equated with traditional scientific research through the Vienna Declaration, with the objective of generating new knowledge that can be built upon by others. While this appears reasonable, several complicating factors arise in practice. Below, I will illustrate this through two distinct models.

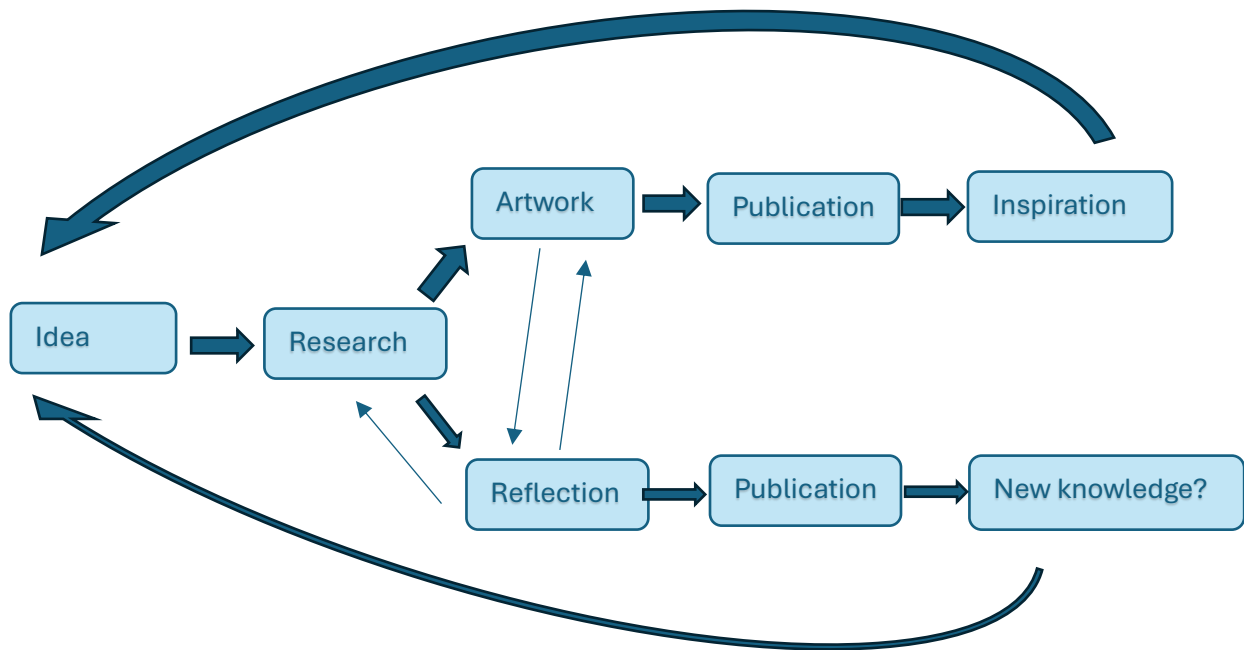
Scientific Research



In scientific research, long-standing traditions and established disciplines exist, characterized by a linear progression from idea to new established knowledge. This new knowledge can be built upon, critiqued, supported, and developed by other researchers, creating a cyclical process that enhances the clarity and reliability of the knowledge. There is also a clear structure in research articles, despite variations between disciplines. The topic or idea is always contextualized within existing knowledge. The research

employs clear methodologies. Publishing channels are widespread and well-known within the field, and published articles clearly articulate the new knowledge.

Artistic Research



Artistic development work is considerably more complex. The upper part, involving artistic practice, is relatively well-established. For instance, a filmmaker begins with an idea or theme that they explore in depth, leading to the production of a filmic work. Publishing often occurs through well-known film festivals, followed by cinema or TV distribution. If the work is particularly innovative and original, it often serves as inspiration for other filmmakers who can build upon, develop the theme, critique, or support the artistic style.

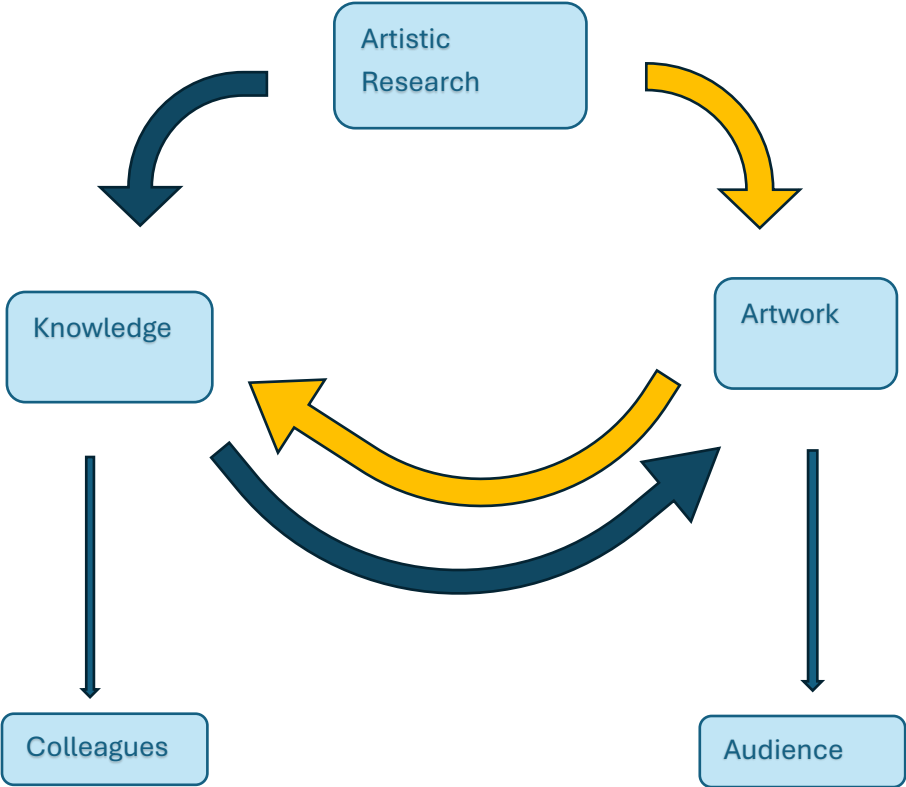
The lower part, involving reflection, is scarcely established, and most practicing artists have limited experience in structuring and expressing this aspect as effectively as their artistic practice. Additional complicating factors arise when there is no established tradition for structure and how the reflection should stand independently. Furthermore, Borgdorff's distinction between "Research for the arts" and "Research in and through the arts" adds complexity. This means that the reflection can precede the production or occur concurrently with the process surrounding the artwork. In many cases, the reflection is embedded within the artwork, but this conceals the potential new knowledge from others.

Publishing the reflection is also not well-established (as evidenced by the limited number of AR publications), and since these have been interdisciplinary until now, the feedback to new ideas or themes is minimal. One could argue that most of the new knowledge remains with the artist and holds significant value for their personal development. The primary challenge is how to make this "tacit knowledge" accessible and relevant to other peers.

Moreover, most faculty members at film schools and other art education institutions have dedicated their lives to developing their own artistic practice and have limited experience with AR methods or verbalizing their research process to generate new knowledge. A major criticism of AR is that its methods and structure are somewhat chaotic and unclear. This is central to Hannula (2002) when he proposes his six steps for structuring the reflection part of AR. When examining film education in the Nordic countries, I have focused on how and to what extent AR is incorporated into the various programs and whether this is explicitly expressed in the study plans.

Conclusion: Utopian Triangle?

Following the preceding discussion, one might hastily conclude that it is utopian to expect AR staff to excel in all these areas: producing high-quality artistic work, publishing outstanding artistic research, and generating new knowledge that peers can build upon. However, after my investigation and discussions with colleagues, I have reached the following conclusion:



Achieving this goal necessitates that educational programs place greater emphasis on AR. The figure above illustrates this complexity, but it also highlights a positive aspect of this triangle: the dynamic interplay between the artwork and knowledge. This dialogical process, often unconscious and internal to the artist, holds significant potential if made explicit and accessible to others. Another value is the possibility of two outcomes for different target group; The Artwork will as always meet a wide audience whereas the articulated knowledge can reach a narrower group of peers and colleagues.

My experience with AR, both as a course coordinator at the bachelor's level and previously at the master's level, indicates that reflection can have substantial intrinsic value, leading to a maturation of the work itself. However, the value of knowledge transfer is diminished because the reflection often remains internal and lacks contextualization. Additionally, there is often limited existing AR to build upon within the themes that students explore.

Regardless of each institution's approach, the trend is clear: there is a more conscious attitude towards AR among faculty members and how it is implemented in educational programs. There are differing opinions on the extent to which AR should be emphasized as a separate subject, but feedback from my informants suggests a positive outlook on the development and opportunities for more sharing and publication of AR knowledge.

At UiS, we have recently restructured the master's program to allow more time for production and to align the theoretical work with the AR definition, creating a clear artistic master's program. In the bachelor's thesis, we have a theoretical component (30%) under "Professional Specialization," where students receive an introduction to the AR concept and how it differs from traditional research.

Based on my investigation into AR development in the Nordic countries, I propose the following points for discussion within the academic community.

1. Should AR be explicitly included in the study plans? If so, how?
2. Should the AR reflection be a separate component with its own assessment?
3. How can AR work be best published, and what structure should it have?
(Research Catalog)
4. How can the connection between reflection and work be strengthened?
5. How can the contextualization of AR within a larger artistic discourse be enhanced?
6. How can AR knowledge build on previous AR?

To conclude, I would like to quote Lucy Cotter, who references Susan Sontag. Cotter expresses concern that AR may only serve to academicize art. She writes:

"Artists use artistic criteria to establish the parameters and form of their research. The dialogues in this book repeatedly suggest that they are less driven by what the work is 'about' than by how they approach their areas of interest. Nor, for that matter, does the work of art have to be 'about' anything for it to be of interest as artistic research. Rather, as Susan Sontag argued over fifty years ago, all forms of art are 'mainly, a form of thinking.' '[E]ach work of art gives us a form or paradigm or model of knowing something, an epistemology." (Cotter, 2017)

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